

## Spotlight

"Our Citizen-Soldiers and -Airmen are absolutely the most patriotic, the most dedicated, the most committed young men and women that I have seen in my 35 years of service."

**GEN. CRAIG R. MCKINLEY**  
Chief of the National Guard  
Bureau

## Sgt. 1st Class Mark Wanner

The Ohio Army National Guard **Special Forces medical sergeant** stood unassuming on a stage Feb. 6 in the Ohio Statehouse atrium to receive the Silver Star Medal—the nation's third highest medal for valor in combat. Despite the season's worst snowstorm, several hundred people, including his fellow Green Berets from the **Columbus-based Company B, 2nd Battalion, 19th Special Forces Group**, Family members, friends and dignitaries traveled to Central Ohio from as far away as Utah to attend the event. Wanner earned his medal for actions during a firefight last May when he saved the life of a fellow Green Beret. "I was just the closest person to him that day. The real heroes are the whole team, our Afghan counterparts," he said. "The whole team's a hero because everyone did their part." Ohio's governor and adjutant general presented Wanner with the medal. It is the first such award for an Ohio Guard member since the Korean War.



## 1st Lt. Justin Abel

This **software engineer** is deployed to Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, working as a computers and communications specialist. "This position requires a background in information technologies and communication systems," he said. "My civilian employer provides me with great experience I can bring to Kosovo to help our team." Back home in Fargo, N.D., he works at Microsoft Corporation. "I miss my job and the amazing people I work with at Microsoft. I am fortunate to have the opportunity to work with great people in both my civilian career and my military career."



## Senior Airman Joshua Wolff

Once the alarm sounds, this Airman must be fully geared-up and heading to his truck within 60 seconds ready to leave the station. As a **crash and fire rescue firefighter** with the **122nd Fighter Wing** of the **Indiana Air National Guard**, he's no stranger to emergency response. Currently deployed with the **388th Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron** in Southwest Asia, Wolff said staying vigilant and flexible is a natural part of his work life and one he takes seriously, especially on his first deployment. "This is a very physical job," he said. "You have to be ready to work no matter what hour of the day; and when called upon, perform your job without hesitation."







## *Capt.* Mark Viau

He's a **public affairs officer** for Utah's 101st Information Operations Flight by day, and an **aspiring actor** by night. He's being cast in his first leading role in a full-length feature film entitled "Diva Force," which is scheduled for release in Fall 2010. "As a traditional Guardsman, there is flexibility between acting and Guard duty," said Viau about trying to balance the two careers.



## *Spc.* Monica Beltran

As one of the Guard's top combat-decorated women, this **Virginia Soldier** recently shared her experiences about the challenges and accomplishments of women in military service during a National Women's History Month event in Washington D.C., in March. She was awarded the Bronze Star Medal with Valor device for her service in Balad, Iraq, in 2005. During her deployment, she said male Soldiers were not comfortable with women serving with them in combat. That may have changed when her convoy came under attack from insurgents wielding improvised explosives, small-arms and grenades. Beltran steadfastly manned her machine gun throughout the firefight while wounded with another Soldier dying. "They did not accept me as being a gunner, but that day I showed them that a female could do just as much as a male, and maybe better."



## *Maj.* Tammy Barlette

She became the first **Remotely Piloted Aircraft pilot** from the reserve component to graduate from the prestigious Weapons Instructor Course in December. Barlette, from the **Arizona's 214th Reconnaissance Group**, completed the course in 5 1/2 months. The Weapons School, regarded as the Air Force's premier weapons and tactics training program, provides graduate-level instructor academic and flying courses. "I've been through a lot of training, but nothing as difficult as this," said Barlette, a former A-10 pilot who left active duty to fly MQ-1 Predators over Iraq and Afghanistan full time with the Guard.



## *Tech. Sgt.* Micah T. Collins

Not only can he organize palettes on a C-130 Hercules, this **loadmaster** from the **Louisiana's 159th Fighter Wing** can handle an academic load. He received the John L. Levitow Award at NCO Academy from the I.G. Brown Air National Guard Training and Education Center at McGhee Tyson Air National Guard Base in Knoxville, Tenn, Feb. 11, 2010. The award goes to the top of the class and is voted on by fellow classmates, teachers and staff. "Professionally, I learned techniques and gained practical experience in managing the Air Force's most valuable assets, our Airmen," said Collins. "Personally, I learned about my limitations and strengths."



Two schools ▷ One goal ▷



I.G. Brown Air National Guard Training & Education Center▷

▷ Make you a professional

National Guard Professional Education Center▷

# TEC: a gateway to career advancement

By Air Force Master Sgt. Mavi Smith

The I.G. Brown Air National Guard Training and Education Center here has provided leadership training to service members for more than 40 years and while Air National Guard is in its name, this center is all about educating the total Air Force.

Since its inception in 1968, the Training and Education Center has provided a shared common academic experience for service members and more.

Located at McGhee Tyson Air National Guard Base near Knoxville, Tenn., the Training and Education Center was named in honor of the first director of the Air National Guard, Maj. Gen. I.G. Brown.

From modest beginnings in a gymnasium and barracks inher-

ited from a long-gone Air Force fighter squadron, the Training and Education Center is now a modern, student-centered campus with classrooms, dormitories, athletic center, and dining hall all within a short walking distance of each other.

More than 4,200 service members pass through the doors of this campus each year. They attend a variety of courses ranging from one to six weeks that include enlisted professional military education, skill enhancement training courses, and distance learning programs.

## THE PAUL H. LANKFORD ENLISTED PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION CENTER

The Lankford Center is one of five Air Force enlisted profes-



# PEC: a nationally renowned military training institute

The Lavern E. Weber Professional Education Center, located at Camp Robinson in North Little Rock, Ark., is the national training center for the Army National Guard.

The Professional Education Center (PEC) has been a full-service training and conference facility since 1974. It's named former National Guard Bureau chief, Army Lt. Gen. Lavern E. Weber.

Over the past quarter of a century, PEC has undergone changes to its leadership, staff, facilities, training methodologies, and conference support. Its mission is committed in providing "excellence in education to the total force." At the heart of the Professional Education Center are the training centers:

- GED Program
- Human Resources and Readiness Training Center
- Information Technology Training Center

- Installations, Logistics & Environmental Training Center
- ESC Training Center
- Organizational Readiness Training Center
- Resource Management Training Center
- Strength Maintenance Training Center

Camp Robinson is home to the PEC and its 75-acre campus consisting of 25 buildings and a total staff of approximately 420 military, civilian contractor personnel. It annually provides instruction to over 20,000 members of the military force.

PEC also hosts over 5,000 conferees annually from the National Guard, Army Reserve, Active Army, DoD, state and federal agencies. Some of the conferences held at PEC include the Army National Guard Senior Commanders' Conference, FORSCOM Command Readiness Program Conference and the





sional military education centers world-wide that is focused on the development of enlisted leaders.

Here, a staff of Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve, and Air Force instructors serve together to train and educate the enlisted leaders of tomorrow.

Through the Airman Leadership School, the Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) Academy, and the satellite broadcast version of both programs, the Lankford Center enhances an enlisted service member's development by strengthening the ability to lead, follow, and manage while they gain a broader understanding of the military profession.

Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve, Air Force, Coast Guard, and Canadian Air Force members learn and study curriculum in the areas of the profession of arms, leadership and communication to build the skills they need for their current rank and to prepare for future responsibilities.

Some of the courses offered are:

- The five-week Airman Leadership School prepares senior airmen for positions of greater responsibility by providing many of the leadership skills required of supervisors and reporting officials.
- The six-week NCO Academy further builds upon those leadership skills by preparing technical sergeants to be professional, war-fighting Airmen who can manage and lead their units.
- The 10- and 12-week Satellite Enlisted Professional Military Education Programs are distance learning versions of the Airman Leadership School and the NCO Academy. In these courses, lessons are broadcast live over the Air National Guard's Warrior Network satellite system to students at their home stations.

Winston P. Wilson Marksmanship Competition.

PEC is on the leading edge of providing Distributed Learning Courses to all members of the National Guard. Its unique mission has allowed the means to prepare, deliver and provide the training that is necessary to train the entire military force by utilizing the latest technologies to accomplish its mission.

PEC is now able to reach the full-time reserve force through the Reserve Component Automation System and other training sites and armories through web-based training, video production, and two-way audio and video. Additionally, PEC collaborates with other schoolhouses and agencies to leverage the full spectrum of media and training delivery. Through these efforts, satellite facilities at its schoolhouse are able to provide the vehicle for training delivery throughout the world.

## MISSION

*To provide training and event support that enhances the readiness of the ARNG*



## SKILL ENHANCEMENT TRAINING

These courses provide personnel in a wide variety of career fields with current policies, guidelines, and administrative practices. They are narrow in focus, targeted to specific areas and designed to enhance job performance. They range in subject from food services, recruiting, and expeditionary medical support to safety, security, and public affairs.

The Public Affairs/Multimedia Management Seminar is a nine-day class offered three times a year. It provides public affairs personnel with needed background and training to manage a base public affairs

## VISION

*To be a nationally renowned military training institute known for exceptional customer service and progressive methods and technologies that exponentially converts training to experience.*



## STRATEGY

*To use the systems approach to training and adult learning methodology, while aggressively seeking new delivery platforms.*

PEC will develop and deliver adaptive, relevant, job-focused and sound educational content taught by PEC certified and qualified instructors with the intent of providing three years of experience in a five-day course. We will schedule to the fullest extent possible to train the ARNG full-time force and select part-time requirements.

PEC will continue to modernize current facilities and incorporate the latest technologies to extend training capabilities to students and attendees.

## VALUES

- **Innovation:** Employing cutting edge technology, processes, and individual creativity and resourcefulness to increase value for our stakeholders and customers
- **Quality:** Continuously improving and delivering the best training, educational experience, and service





multimedia service

Like many of the other 40 skill enhancement training courses held here, the Public Affairs class has a long history at the Training and Education Center. It was created by a group of volunteers in 1984, and has trained more than 1,500 Airmen.

## TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION BRANCH

To transform is to change. Transformative education is about affecting change through knowledge or skills.

The Transformative Education branch provides numerous professional and personal development courses as well as produces advanced distributive learning initiatives that reach service members worldwide.

They have created numerous advanced distributive learning products and are currently producing the Nuclear Weapons Related Materiel (NWRM) Fundamentals course for the Air Force. This course will provide a basic knowledge of NWRM management procedures and will be mandatory training for all Air Force logistics and maintenance personnel who have NWRM duties and responsibilities.

## TEC TV

From the television studios at TEC TV, 1st Air Force at Tyndall AFB, Fla., and the Air National Guard Readiness Center at Andrews AFB, Md., more than 400 hours of live interactive training, education and command information are broadcast each year from the Training and Education Center to audiences worldwide.

## IT'S ALL ABOUT TRAINING AND EDUCATION

From satellite television broadcasts from the TEC TV studios, to advanced distributive learning courses created by the Transformative Education branch, to traditional classroom instruction provided by skill enhancement training and enlisted professional military education instructors, the Training and Education Center is on the cutting edge of military education.

And while Air National Guard may be in its name, the I.G. Brown Air National Guard Training and Education Center is all about total Air Force education and more.

More information on the Training and Education Center can be found at [www.angtec.ang.af.mil](http://www.angtec.ang.af.mil).

TEC received  
its 8th  
Air Force  
Organizational  
Excellence  
Award in  
January

- **Integrity:** Do what is legally, morally, and ethically right
- **Results Oriented:** Staying focused on results to support PEC's mission and vision
- **Customer Focused:** Successfully anticipating and responding to the requirements of our current and potential customers
- **Teamwork:** Individuals focused on reaching shared organizational goals
- **Family Oriented:** Fostering an environment that supports and respects the internal and external PEC family

## NEW COMPLEX

In early 2009, an \$18.4 million construction project broke ground at PEC that aimed to triple the capacity of those that attend the GED Plus program at PEC. Once completed (expected in early 2010), the training complex will allow for up to 7,500 students to pass through the program each

year.

The GED Plus program allows non-high school graduates to enlist in the Army National Guard with the stipulation they earn their GED prior to attending basic combat training. In order to reach that goal, those in the program attend a resident course at PEC that prepares them to complete the GED exam.

"[It] will allow us to reach out and engage a larger portion of our youth that don't complete high school, but who do have the ability to

grow, serve and make a positive contribution to our country," said Col. John Frost, commandant of PEC.







# PEC visits TEC to explore collaboration opportunities

By Master Sgt. Mavi Smith

Leadership from PEC visited the I.G. Brown Air National Guard Training and Education Center at McGhee Tyson ANGB in December to explore opportunities for collaboration between the two training centers.

"The Army Guard has such an established program with the PEC," said Col. Richard B. Howard, TEC commander. "So, sharing ideas with the PEC folks today on how we might be able to develop ourselves to reach and match the vision of the chief of the National Guard Bureau to expand to meet the needs of the Air National Guard and the total force... is going to help us get there."

PEC's leadership spent the day on a whirlwind tour to learn more about TEC.

The main thing we wanted to do is try and learn from each other's organizations and see where there might be some opportunities

for us to partner together to make both organizations even better and stronger," said Army Col. John M. Frost, commandant of the PEC.

PEC leadership received informative briefings from Howard and the center's Enlisted Professional Military Education, Transformative Education, and TEC TV branches. Air Force Col. Timothy T. Dearing, commander of the 134th Air Refueling Wing, also joined the group and provided an overview of the missions accomplished at McGhee Tyson and his commitment to TEC.


PEC leadership toured the campus and visited the classrooms of the 130 students attending Satellite NCO Academy Class 10-2.

"I enjoyed the opportunity to not only see the classrooms here at TEC and how you're structured, but to visit with some of the TEC students," said Army Maj. Sean Gavan, chief of operations for PEC.

During the visit, lessons learned were shared; training, planning and registration issues were discussed; and similarities between the organizations were explored. While the missions of the two organizations are different, many of the participants expressed synergies for collaboration.

"One of the synergies I see is in conference capabilities," said Frost. "And I also think there will be opportunities to do leadership training at either location that is applicable to both services."

"I actually find between the Army and the Air Guard training methodologies and the resourcing, we are very much similar," said Gavan. "I look forward to seeing how we can expand our capabilities ... in the future."

In April 2009, members of TEC and the 134th Air Refueling Wing traveled to TEC in Camp Robinson, Ark., for a similar visit. 





Hundreds gather for a welcome home ceremony for more than 250 New Jersey Soldiers in Trenton. (Photo by Tech. Sgt. Mark Olsen)



Vermont Soldiers launch a 120mm mortar at Camp Atterbury, Ind. (Photo by John)



South Dakota Soldiers throw sandbags onto a raft for transport to flooded Red River March 25. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Theanne Tangen)



New Jersey Tech. Sgt. Barbara Harman reads a Dr. Seuss book to a group of elementary school children at a Read Across America event (Photo by John)





ortar at fixed targets on a range  
(Photo by Tech. Sgt. John Crosby)



bison, 108th Air Wing, reads  
mentary students during the  
(Photo by Tech. Sgt. Mark Olsen)



Four F-15 Eagles from Florida's 125th Fighter Wing fly a historic flight over Sun Life Stadium for Superbowl XLIV in February 2010. It marked the first Air National Guard fly over in the history of the Super Bowl. (Photo by Tech. Sgt. Shelley Gill)



Alaska Military Youth Academy Cadet Vaise Poasa Jr. plays the snare drum during a drill and ceremony skills event in February 2010. (Photo by Army Sgt. Karima Turner)



# Sisterhood

## Deployment TIPS for families

- ➔ Be a good role model by demonstrating good coping techniques.
- ➔ Allow and encourage children to express their feelings and try to accept them.
- ➔ Establish rules and limits, as a family, BEFORE deployment around the issues of:
  - Consequences for disobeying family rules.
  - Money and allowances.
  - Chores and responsibilities.
  - Avoid saying, "Wait until your father/mother gets home!"
  - Be flexible enough to adjust the rules and limits as necessary
- ➔ Spend time together as a family, with each child and as a couple.
- ➔ Emphasize the importance of school:
  - Visit school before deployment and talk to teacher.
  - Leave stamped envelopes for teacher to mail progress reports, schoolwork, etc.
  - Tell your child that school is important.
  - Send cards, letters, pictures, foreign money, restaurant menus, etc to class.

## Guard daughters hold first conference for teen girls

Moranda Hern

Kaylei Deakin



Nearly 100 teenage girls from throughout California gathered in March to take part in the Sisterhood of the Traveling BDUs event. (Photo by Tech. Sgt. David J. Loeffler)

### By Air Force Maj. Kimberly Holman CALIFORNIA NATIONAL GUARD

In a popular movie, "The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants," a group of teenage girls keep in contact with each other by sharing a pair of jeans.

That theme provided the inspiration

for an idea by two California National Guard daughters, but instead of a pair of jeans, battle dress uniforms (BDU) became the shared bond between more than 100 girls.

Seventeen-year-olds Kaylei Deakin and Moranda Hern met at California first lady Maria Shriver's 2008 Women's Conference. The girls found they had many things in common, including a need to feel understood while going through the challenges that military deployments bring to families.

After more than a year of planning and organizing, Deakin and Hern brought teenage girls together from across California for a weekend in March that coincidentally marked the seventh anniversary of the beginning of the war in Iraq.

"I remember watching stories about the war in class, and people would giggle and

## BENEFITS of deployments for teens

- Increased independence and self-confidence.
- Strengthened relationship with parent at home.
- Families learn to establish goals and plan together.
- Re-evaluation of rules.
- Teen and deployed parent may become closer through letters, e-mails, cards and packages.
- Teen learns about the world and world affairs.





laugh as the bombs were going off," said Kaylei, whose father left to fight in Afghanistan a few years later, when she was 13. "I was so worried ... thinking about what was going on over there."

She said her father's deployment affected her family long before and long after he left California. She felt like no one really understood the empty feeling she had inside as she watched her world change dramatically while her dad was deployed.

For the two years he was gone, Kaylei felt depressed and lonely, and she felt she needed to step up in her father's absence to provide strength beside her mother and take over in areas of sibling discipline.

When Kaylei met Moranda, they found they shared similar experiences. Moranda's father is in the Air Guard, while Kaylei's father is in the Army Guard. And at times when the girls needed their friends' support the most, the girls felt that they were very alone.

"People saw a big change in me after my dad left, and a lot of them just stopped coming around because they weren't sure of what to say or how to act around me," said Moranda, whose father deployed to Afghanistan on very short notice when she was 15. "I felt like I was just some weird person who couldn't get it together."

Realizing there were thousands of girls going through similar experiences, Kaylei and Moranda decided to form a support network and organize a first-ever conference for daughters of military members.

The girls put together a proposal and brought a presentation to Brig. Gen. Mary J. Kight, who was the assistant adjutant general of the California National Guard at the time, whom the girls had met at the 2008 Women's Conference.

Kight was impressed and vowed to do everything she could to support the effort.

"The Guard provided the Sisterhood of the Traveling BDUs with the structure, and

the girls provided all the innovation, imagination and creativity," she said. "I am so proud of them for seeing this through, and what a wonderful program they have founded."

The two high schoolers raised \$30,000 through various corporate sponsors to provide an all-expenses-paid weekend for girls ages 13-17.

The conference theme was "Unite, Inspire, Lead," and girl-power was ever-present throughout the weekend. The girls arrived at the conference in semi-formal attire on the first evening for a "purple carpet" event, complete with flashing cameras and a receiving line that included Kaylei, Moranda and Kight, who is now the adjutant general of the California Guard.

The weekend included several guest speakers, including an Olympic gold medalist, a Hollywood image consultant and corporate executives. Workshops and break-out sessions brought girls together on issues ranging from self-esteem, self-image and career plans, to boys and relationships.

The venue provided a nonthreatening environment, while the sisterly support provided teens an opportunity to reach out and share stories and get to know each other.

Many of the girls discussed their fear of something happening to a parent in combat. Others shared the experience of attempting to console a worried mother while Dad is away, or knowing that one of their parents won't be able to see them go to prom or graduate from high school.

Kaylei plans to enlist in the Marines after graduating from high school in June, and Moranda has been accepted into the Air Force Academy. Many other girls at the conference also have plans to follow in their parents' footsteps.

"I hope that the girls come away from this knowing that the next time a deployment rolls around that they will be supported, and that they have a network — it won't have to be the way it's always been," Moranda said on the last night of the conference.

Kaylei and Moranda hope other teen girls will keep the "sisterhood" alive and will call upon each other for help when they need it. They plan to go national with the organization and create chapters in other states during the next year.



**unite, inspire, lead**

## Deployment CHECKLIST for parents of teens

☒ Are you aware of the developmental milestones your teenager may be achieving? They are:

- Gaining independence and becoming more responsible.
- Trying new behaviors.
- Unpredictable - new friends, hairstyles, piercing, clothes, music, etc.
- Questioning the "status quo."
- Are aware of world issues.

☒ Do you know how does your teen typically react to stress? They may:

- Have personality changes such being moody, loud, or quiet.
- Challenge parent's ideas and way of life.
- Be very sensitive and feel misunderstood.
- Experience a drop in school performance.
- Experiment with alcohol or drugs.

☒ Have you had a family meeting to discuss the deployment?

☒ Have you told your teenager where you are going, why you are going and approximately when you will return, if known?

☒ Have you addressed any concerns your teen may have about safety?

☒ Have you made a communication plan with your teenager, provided them with your email and regular mail address, and asked them to keep in touch?

☒ Have you reminded your teen that school work is important and that you'd like to receive progress reports from them?

☒ Did you include money in your budget for phone calls, gifts/souvenirs for your teenager?

☒ Do you and your teen have a support system — people you can reach in person, by phone or email — you can turn to for assistance during the deployment?

☒ Have you avoided putting added responsibilities on your teen by not making comments such as "You're the man in the family" or "Take care of your little brother"?



uncertainty  
deployment  
cancer  
Hodgkin's  
Lymphoma

# Guardsman reflects on her incredible journey

By Air Force Capt. Penny Ripperger  
NORTH DAKOTA NATIONAL GUARD

*Not many people would consider themselves lucky when they get cancer. Fewer would look at their experience as an inspirational journey filled with an array of vivid memories and life lessons. And only the exceptional few would find humor in their illness.*

**Senior Airman Theta Olson is the exception.**

She won her battle with cancer, but that's not the story here. It's how this 21-year-old overcame a life-threatening illness with spunk and dignity, never missing a moment to laugh.

## The diagnosis

"I deployed to Kuwait in May. It was about my second or third week there, and I rubbed my shoulder and felt a large lump. At first I thought it must be from my gear, but it didn't hurt like a normal muscle knot, so I thought I better get it checked out," Olson said.

A physician assumed it was some sort of bug bite and gave her a week's worth of antibiotics.

"I thought the antibiotics were overkill. I'm thinking, 'I'm fine, it's just some lump. I don't need to take this,' but I took the antibiotics anyway and the lump never went away," Olson said.

Next, she was sent to a nearby Navy hospital to get an ultrasound.

**"This Marine had his leg amputated. He was in a lot of pain, but the whole time he was joking with the nurse that he wanted his prosthetic leg to be turned into a 'machinegun leg' so he could go back to the fight"**

"After the ultrasound the doctor told me he thought it might be lymphoma. I said 'lymp-what?' I had no idea what that even was. I thought it was some type of cold or something," Olson said.

The doctor encouraged her to be medevaced to Germany for more tests. Olson was hesitant.

"I was excited about being in Kuwait and I didn't want to go back. I had just finished my training and unpacking. I had worked hard to get to where I was and it was my time to shine," Olson said. "I think I was also in denial. I wanted to be ignorant and play it off like nothing is happening, that these people don't know me, they're just exaggerating."

She requested a second opinion, and to her dismay, the second doctor agreed that she should go to Germany for more tests. Still not completely sold on the idea of leaving Kuwait for Germany, the civil engineering commander finally convinced her to return home.

Olson was medevaced to Landstuhl, a military hospital near Ramstein Air Base in Germany. She described her experience there as "insanely awesome." Tests were performed with no lines, no waiting. It felt like VIP treatment.

She was feeling optimistic and no one thought she had cancer. She was too young, too healthy. With the exception of the lump, she had none of the signs that typical patients have. Even the medical professionals who were giving her tests expressed doubts, but soon her optimism would face its first real test.

"I was walking back from chow and I saw my doctor waiting for me by my barracks. As soon as I saw him, my heart sank. I knew he wouldn't be meeting me like this if it wasn't bad news. I was with some friends and he asked to see me alone, but I wanted him to tell me the news with my friends near me, so he did. He told me I had Hodgkin's Lymphoma and that I was about to begin an incredible



journey,” Olson said.

### **The trip home**

Olson boarded the rotator to take her back to the United States on June 28, 2009. It would be on this flight that she would meet military members of all branches with varying degrees of injuries.

One person she remembers fondly is a Marine who sat by her.

“This Marine had his leg amputated. He was in a lot of pain, but the whole time he was joking with the nurse that he wanted his prosthetic leg to be turned into a ‘machinegun leg’ so he could go back to the fight,” Olson said.

She also remembers holding the Marine’s Purple Heart. It was the first time she had seen the medal up close. It especially struck home for her when she found out that he was her age.

“You don’t realize the impact of those who are injured until you actually see it firsthand. The nurses on those planes were incredible. They would go above and beyond to help their patients and make us as comfortable as possible throughout the flights. They weren’t helping us just because we were patients; it was because we were their brothers and sisters in arms. I will never forget that,” Olson said.

The stories of the patients on the plane ranged from tragic to funny, Olson said. She chuckled as she described her interaction with a Soldier: “When I asked him why his leg was in a cast, he said, ‘you know, Humvees ... well, they shouldn’t be taken off-roading.’”

After several days of flight, Olson finally landed at Lackland Air Force Base in San

**“The drugs are literally fighting cell regeneration and that is why your hair falls out and your fingernails stop growing. But on the plus side, I didn’t have to shave my legs for months and it cleared up my complexion”**

Antonio, Texas. Her parents, (retired Master Sgt.) Gordy Olson and Sheila Olson, were at the base to greet her.

“Once my mom saw me she was able to deal with it a lot better,” Olson said. Living in a military family, her mom was accustomed to the risks of deployments. “She was ready for me to come home missing a limb or even worse, but she wasn’t ready for me to come home with cancer. She wasn’t prepared for me to have to fight for my life in the U.S.”

### **The Cancer Lottery**

Hodgkin’s Lymphoma has a 95 percent recovery rate and typically affects people in their early 20s to early 40s. Olson describes that acquiring this type of cancer is like winning the “cancer lottery” because of its high success rate.

“It affects the lymph nodes all over your body. Unlike other cancers, like breast cancer, you can’t just cut out the abnormal cells because the lymph nodes are all connected together. If you take out one cancerous lymph node, it will just come back. The only way to treat it is through chemo,” Olson said.

The normal military procedure was

for Olson to be treated at Lackland AFB over a six-month time-period. Olson wanted to come back to North Dakota for her treatment, and her Happy Hooligan family fought to get her home.

“I went to high school in Virginia, but my dad who spent most of his military career with the Happy Hooligans, talked me into moving to North Dakota and joining the Air Guard. Now, I’m so glad I did because it was unprecedented what the Wing did for me. They fought to get me here, to get me home for treatment,” she said.

Olson explained that Airmen like Senior Master Sgt. Mike Anders, of the 119th Wing Medical Group, pleaded her case by explaining that much of her treatment depends on her attitude and how she can handle the stress. Anders and others said that she would recover faster if she could come home and work at the base among her fellow Hooligans between chemo treatments.

The diligence paid off. Olson was approved to come home. She began her chemo treatments on July 9, 2009, at the Roger Maris Cancer Center in Fargo, N.D.

### **Treatment**

Hodgkin’s Lymphoma spreads fast. Often, people who have this type of cancer do not display any physical signs until it has progressed to stage three or four, meaning that it is in multiple areas of the body.

“I was lucky, because I had the noticeable lump on my shoulder. I also had a cancer spot in my chest that I was completely unaware of. Even though we caught my cancer right away, I was still already at stage two,” Olson said.

Although each case is treated uniquely based on the individual, typically patients up to 20 years old, which was Olson’s age at the time, are placed in the pediatric ward for treatment. That’s where she met her doctor, the man who would help her through the next several months with laughter and support.

“One of the first things Dr. Kobrinski told me was, ‘The object of the game is to kill the cancer before the poison (chemo treatment) kills you. But I’m really good at this, so don’t worry.’ He was funny from the start,” Olson said.

Olson described how the actual day she received the chemo treatments she felt fine. It was about a week later that the effects on her body showed.

“The drugs are literally fighting cell regeneration and that is why your hair falls out and your fingernails stop growing,” Olson said. “But on the plus side, I didn’t have to



Senior Airman Theta Olson used a positive attitude, humor and the love from family and friends like her father to overcome cancer. Courtesy photo.



shave my legs for months and it cleared up my complexion," she joked.

At one point, Olson was on 19 different medications and going in for chemo treatments several days a week. She explained that she learned a great deal about herself throughout the entire process — how a person reacts to the different drugs and situations, physically and emotionally. She also appreciated the support from her friends, family and coworkers at the Wing.

"There were days when I was so tired that I would sleep 20 hours. It took everything I had to pull myself out of bed to eat," Olson said. "I wanted to work to keep myself busy, but knowing that on the rough days that I didn't have to go into work if I didn't feel up to it was a huge relief."

Through it all, she did her best to keep her sense of humor and stay positive.

"Sure, there were sad moments. At first, I was really angry at the cancer, at my situation. But it's hard to stay mad when you're sitting in pediatrics next to a happy, bald 3-year-old who is getting chemo with you," she said.

Olson continued the treatment and was shocked by the outstanding support she received. Within her own squadron, she found comfort in the fact that two Airmen she works with recently overcame their own battles with cancer.

"By the time I was getting treatment, both of my coworkers were in remission. Knowing that they had fought this battle and won was a constant reminder that I would be

**"Sure, there were sad moments. At first, I was really angry at the cancer, at my situation. But it's hard to stay mad when you're sitting in pediatrics next to a happy, bald 3-year-old who is getting chemo with you"**

okay too," said Olson.

She also described the Comfort Shawl and Burden Bear that she received from the Enlisted Association. Rosie Clemenson, wife of Chief Master Sgt. Jim Clemenson and mother to Master Sgt. Erik E. Clemenson and Capt. Justin J. Clemenson, both of the 119th Wing, nominated her for the items.

"I didn't think I would at first, but I did use the Comfort Shawl and every time I looked at that bear it would remind me of all the people who were thinking and praying for me. When you have that much support, you know you're not going to fall," she said.

Another supporter, Olson's boyfriend, Senior Airman Adam Morine, a fellow Happy Hooligan, who deployed to Iraq in January of 2009, kept in contact with her throughout her treatment. She knew he was a keeper when after he saw her for the first time without any hair via video feed, he said, 'Wow, you look hot bald!' Olson laughed, "I told him he had been in Iraq too long."

Shortly after her boyfriend's return

home in August, Olson was asked to come to the center to see Dr. Kobrinski. She didn't know what to expect, she only knew that he wanted to see her right away. She brought her boyfriend along for moral support.

"I was nervous. I didn't know why he wanted to see me. I'm an optimistic person, but I also work in emergency management, so I'm envisioning and trying to prepare myself for the worst-case scenario," Olson said.

Dr. Kobrinski soon calmed her fears and told her the wonderful news that her cancer was in remission. She was cancer-free after just two cycles, two months sooner than expected.

Olson laughed. "Adam came home on a Tuesday and I was in remission by Friday, now that's a good week!"

At Morine's return home celebration the following week, people would say to Olson, "Oh you have cancer and Adam would quickly correct them and say, 'No, she HAD cancer. It's gone!' It was a good day," Olson said.

### **Timing is everything**

After Olson went into remission, she went through two more rounds of chemo as a safety precaution, which is typical. Through it all, her thoughts often drifted back to the desert where she was first diagnosed.

"Half your heart is in the desert and half your heart is here. So when the Airmen I served with came home in October, about the time I finished my last round of chemo, it was good closure for me," Olson said.

Life is getting back to normal. Her spunk and humor are still in check. She's back at North Dakota State University finishing her double major in emergency management and sociology.

"I tried to get a note from Dr. Kobrinski for no homework, but he refused," Olson chuckled. "But I still think he's an amazing doctor."

It seems that the doctor who stood outside Olson's barracks that unforgettable day in Germany and confirmed that she had cancer was also correct that she would begin an incredible journey. Without a doubt, Olson had the journey of a lifetime in 2009, a year she will never forget.

"On New Year's Eve I was thinking about everything that has happened throughout the year. Winning Airman of the Year, my Kuwait deployment and I beat cancer ... yeah; it's been quite a year. It's been a really good year," Olson said.



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**ALLIES IN THE BATTLE AGAINST HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE AND STROKE**



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# A VIEW ON LIFE A

**Thirty-five years in uniform, three wars, 30 bases, 20 aircraft, 90 years worth of wisdom. Meet a Colorado National Guard living legend.**

*He's strafed German troop trains in France's Saar Valley, married the woman who treated his battle wounds, stalled out in a fireball of destruction in Korea, survived 100 combat missions in Vietnam, flew 20 different aircraft, was stationed at 30 bases around the world—there's not a lot that Bill Eugene Myers, Colorado National Guard's oldest living veteran, has **not** done in his 35-year military career, except talk about it—until now.*

**By Air Force Staff Sgt. Aaron Rognstad**  
**COLORADO NATIONAL GUARD**

Tucked away atop a hill near Bailey, Colo., resides 90-year-old Bill Eugene Myers. His house, perched on a knoll, offers a spectacular view of the Front Range foothills. Spectacular too is this veteran's longevity and experiences in three wars.

At 5 feet, 8 inches tall with a gaunt frame, Myers doesn't brag about his exploits in World War II, Korea or Vietnam. He rarely talks about them, and then only with the right company.

He answered the door for this interview dressed in a flannel shirt, blue jeans and cowboy boots – the look of a rancher.

Inside, his living room holds pictures of high adventure in flight and many books on aviation and military history. With help of that memorabilia, including die-cast metal models of fighter planes, Myers recalled the memories of wars where the objectives were clear and the rules less confining.

## **Military beginnings**

He joined the Colorado Army Guard's 168th Field Artillery in Golden in 1938. His drill check for a private back then was \$5 – used for spending money, he said.

He had always been interested in the military growing up. After spending a good portion of his childhood on his grandparent's ranch, he became fascinated with the cavalry. Off to military school he went. Randolph-Macon Academy in Front Royal, Va., taught young Myers conformity and a highly structured lifestyle.

"I enjoyed it. It was tough. They don't have them





# ND WAR

like that anymore. They hazed you and beat you when you were a freshman."

Myers graduated from the academy in 1938 and joined the Colorado Army Guard that same year while attending the Colorado School of Mines in Golden. Within two years, Myers had flunked chemistry and was flat broke. He dropped out of school, took a short hiatus from the Guard and worked in a lead, zinc and silver mine in the panhandle of Idaho for six months in order to get back on his feet financially.

"One day the Guard sent me a letter stating that if I went on active duty with them for a year, they would make me a staff sergeant," Myers recalled, who was a corporal then. And took up the offer

Myers said a Guardsman's average drill in the CONG field artillery prior to World War II consisted of drill and ceremony, classes and training on the French 75mm artillery piece at Camp George West in Golden.

"We had just been mechanized," Myers said. "When I joined I thought we were still using horses, but trucks were pulling our artillery. The world was changing."

And it was about to change in a monumental way.

## A sign from the sky

Myers' unit was activated in early 1941 and put on a year's worth of orders. The unit convoyed for training to Camp Forest, Tenn., attached to the 7th Army Corps. Off base one Sunday afternoon while Myers was on a date, he heard the news that Pearl Harbor had been bombed and America was now at war.

His regiment was immediately ordered to the Philip-

pinas but due to the extensive amount of transports being sunk on their way to the islands, Myers and his fellow Soldiers ended up at Camp Roberts near Paso Robles, Calif., for a short stint before they were moved up to Camp McQuaid at Monterrey Bay, Calif.

"California thought the invasion was coming," Myers said. "We were all on alert. There were Cossack posts (sentries) on every bridge and everything was blacked out at night."

It was around this time that Myers made the switch to the U.S. Army Air Corps. The clincher came a year before while he was on maneuvers in Louisiana. He knew he wanted to fly when his truck was hit with a flour sack dropped from a circling airplane on a training bomb run. Right then he knew he was on the wrong end of things.

Myers put in his paperwork for a commission and flight school. He thought if he didn't make it through flight school, he'd end up a gunner or a maintenance troop on a ground crew, which would still be better than the field artillery.

After more than a year at flight school, Myers earned his wings as a single-engine fighter pilot and commissioned second lieutenant. It was 1943 and the air war in Europe was raging.

In January 1944, the 24-year-old Myers found himself stationed in England flying P-47s on missions over Western Europe. His missions consisted of fighter sweeps (strafing and dive-bombing ground targets) and bomber escorts.

"Anything that moved was a target – period – anything that moved," Myers said. "They didn't have all these restrictions in what you can and can't hit these days."

Myers said he had three air-to-air kills, 12 air-to-ground, two







**1920:** Bill Eugene Myers is born in, Ra  
**1938:** Joins the Colorado Army Guard  
**1941:** While training to Camp Forest,  
**1944:** Stationed in England flying P-4  
**1950:** Flying P-51 Mustangs with 67th  
**1967:** Serves year in Vietnam as depu  
**1973:** Retires as a colonel and returns  
**1983:** Retires for good after working

Left: Bill Myers holds the photo of his original 168th Service Battery, Colorado Army National Guard. He shows off his military patch collection spanning from 1938 as a private in the field artillery. Every squadron or unit that Myers was either in or was a member of (photos by Staff Sgt. Aaron Rognstad)

probables (might or might have not been shot down in the air) and three damaged – all aircraft of some sort. Periodically, Myers and his fellow pilots would throw parties to celebrate air victories and blow off some steam from the stressors of constant air combat.

“In those days you were supposed to get a shot of whiskey after every mission,” Myers said. “We did that the first couple days and then realized that was a waste of whiskey. What good’s one shot of whiskey? So we started saving our shots for one big party.”

### Bail out or belly-in

It was at one of these parties that Myers met his future wife – a 22-year-old Army second lieutenant physiotherapist named Louise – but at the time she was dating his company officer. A few months later Myers began to date Louise after he was treated by her for wounds stemming from the strafing of a German troop train in the Saar Valley in France in late November 1944.

Myers’ plane was hit from multiple shells fired from an anti-aircraft gun mounted on the roof of the train. Flak from the shells tore into Myers’ body. His engine was on fire and he knew that he was going to have to bail out. After reaching an altitude of around 2,000 feet, the fire in Myers’ P-47 engine extinguished, but oil continued to pour out of it.

“If you lost your oil, you were in deep trouble,” Myers said. “I thought I was well over 10 miles behind our lines and finally the oil pressure went to zero. So I started to look for places to belly-in, because you never bailed out of a P-47 if you could belly-in because you’re apt to get killed real easy.”

With blood spurting from an artery in his wrist and his plane out of oil, Myers crash landed in a field. American troops found Myers lying next to his plane and told him that he had crashed only a couple hundred yards from the German lines.

Myers had flak lodged in his neck, chest, left leg, right shoulder, hand, and even between his eyes. Despite his injuries, he was back in the cockpit within a month.

“I was real lucky,” Myers said. “Luck and stupidity took over skill and cunning.”

Myers flew 147 combat missions over Europe in World War II that included sorties for Gen. George S. Patton’s legendary 3rd Army that broke out across France. Myers came home from the war a decorated

hero. But it wouldn’t be his last time.

### Same tactics, different aircraft, new enemy

After the war, Myers remained on active duty and was stationed at a series of U.S. Air Force bases. Along the way his son Peter and his daughter Sally were born.

In 1947, the Army Air Corps became the Air Force while Myers was stationed at Eglin Field, Fla. He said there was no big ceremony of any sort inaugurating the new branch and the only thing that changed was the new uniforms.

“We were sort of glad to be our own outfit,” Myers said of the transition.

Within the newly established Air Force, many squadrons were transitioning from propeller-driven planes to jets around this time, and Myers became certified on the new P-80 Shooting Star at Pine Castle Air Force Base in San Bernadino, Calif.

“It was quite a jump,” Myers said of the new jet. “It took a little longer to take off; the temperature affected it more ... . There were no simulators and there were no two-seaters, so it was kind of like your first solo all over again the first time you flew it.”

In June 1950, North Korea crossed the 38th-parallel border and invaded South Korea. It didn’t take long for Myers to get back into aerial combat. By August that year he was flying P-51 Mustangs with the 67th Fighter Squadron out of Taegu, Korea.

Myers’ missions were primarily ground support operations that dealt with low-level bombing and strafing. He said there was always lots of anti-aircraft fire that he and his pilots had to deal with, due to this, the rate of downed P-51 fighters in his squadron was greater than that of the P-47s in his old squadron in World War II.

Myers recalled one close call over the skies of Korea.

“I saw this big haystack that I thought might be hiding something, so I gave it a burst and it blew up right in front of me. I was very low to the ground and I flew right through the fireball. My engine was dead and I punched everything (the tanks and bombs). I switched gas tanks and hit the primer and my engine started running. From there I flew it on home.”

Myers said air and ground combat tactics in Korea were similar with those in World War II, just on a much smaller level. Myers made the rank



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of major during his year-and-a-half in the war. He was 31 years old when he left and had flown 90 combat missions. He saw helicopters for the first time while he was there as well as the first jets in combat. He also saw from the air the devastation that the Chinese inflicted on an American division during the massive Chinese offensive in the fall of 1951.

"An entire American division was retreating while the Chinese were advancing," Myers said. "I saw SOS stamped out in the snow and all around it were the remains of tanks and equipment. The whole division was wiped out."

Even though the war was considered a success by American standards, Myers felt as if he and his pilots had certain restrictions placed on them that kept them from inflicting the maximum amount of damage upon the enemy, unlike World War II. Myers said he couldn't bomb certain parts of North Korean infrastructure that he thought to be a threat.

He liked Korea though, and said it was interesting and beautiful from the air.

"There were lots of hilltop fortresses and old Chinese ruins," Myers said. "I was just glad to be up in the air and not down on the ground slugging it out."

Upon his return to the States, Myers and his wife Louise had their third child – a girl they named Terri – in 1952.

### **Vietnam – "That was a bad one."**

Based out of Tuy Hoa, Myers was the deputy commander of materiel for the 31st Wing during his year in Vietnam in 1967-68. He was in charge of the wing's avionics, munitions and field maintenance.

As a colonel, Myers was still flying close-air-support combat missions in F-100 Super Sabres. If Korea put restrictions on Myers and his pilots, Vietnam was a chokehold.

"You couldn't hit a target until you got permission from the providence chief," Myers said. "You had to coordinate with the Vietnamese on a lot of targets and you couldn't fly into Laos or Cambodia."

Overall, Myers was disappointed in the outcome of the war.

"It sure wasn't like World War II or Korea," Myers said. "We didn't lose the war. They (the politicians and American citizens) lost it in the States. That was a bad one."

Myers rarely saw what he was bombing in Vietnam. He said all he would see was a bunch of leaves and some smoke go up after his bombs

hit the ground. The tree cover was so thick that it concealed targets most of the time. He said the landscape of the country from the air was a triple canopy layer of trees and beautiful beaches along the coast. He didn't get to see much else of the country as he rarely went off base except for missions in the air.

Myers flew 100 combat missions during the war. It would be his last war in a decorated military career that saw him fly 20 different aircraft while stationed at 30 different bases around the world over the span of 32 years.

### **A love of flight and airplanes**

Myers retired from the Air Force in 1973 as a colonel and returned home to Colorado to settle down with his wife – so he thought.

In 1973, Myers took an aircraft quality control position as a contractor for the Royal Saudi Air Force and he and Louise ventured off to Dahran, Saudi Arabia. What he thought was only going to be a two-year position ended up being 10 as he and Louise came to enjoy the country and his salary.

"It was a land of swift justice, good food and beautiful beaches," Myers said of Saudi Arabia.

Myers retired for good in 1983 and now enjoys reading books – mainly works of history – and riding horses.

"When you retire, you have no more weekends," Myers said. "It's all one long weekend from there on out."

Myers paused monetarily and lit up his corn cob pipe while a Hank Williams song could be faintly heard on the radio. Snowfall hindered the normally beautiful view from Myers' living room window. Not a good day for flying.

What was it about flying that Myers loved so much to do it for more than 30 years?

"It was exciting," Myers said. "You think of nothing else but flying when you are in the air in a fighter. It's total focus when you're in the cockpit or you're dead. When I was a little kid I wanted to be like my granddad and raise horses. But soon as I started flying, I knew that was what I wanted to do over and above the rest."

The Colorado National Guard, the Air Force and a grateful nation are thankful he pursued his passion. 🦋